

## **88 Penn Bus Stop Consolidation Community Meeting**

Co-Hosted by Bloomfield-Garfield Corp. and Bloomfield Development Corp.

January 23, 2020

Taken by Christina Howell, Executive Director, Bloomfield Development Corporation

Facilitator: Sam Spearing, Housing & Mobility Coordinator, Bloomfield Development Corp.

BGC Staff present: Nina Sauer

### **Section I: Presentation from Bloomfield Development Corp.**

Sam Spearing (SS)

Information on current consolidation plans

- Overview of all stops being consolidated
- Data showing rider on/off data at stops to be consolidated
- Criteria for decision making by PAT
- Goals of the consolidation plan as expressed by Port Authority

### **Section II: Questions and Comments**

**CH:** Christina Howell

**SS:** Sam Spearing

**FM:** Fred Mergner, resident and researcher on consolidation

**R:** Resident

**PAT:** Port Authority Transit

**R:** Where is the port authority?

**SS:** They were invited but declined to attend

**FM:** Stood up and introduced himself and asked to speak - identified himself as a transit rider and former employee who planned bus routes. Identifies as a transit dependent rider by choice.

- Every bus stop is important to a bus dependent rider because I might be going multiple places. For example in one hour to do holiday shopping I rode 4 different buses.
- Millvale/Penn bus stop was designed to be a bus stop and is a safer and simpler intersection than Mathilda/Penn where there are more cars and more lanes. Millvale/Penn is one block from West Penn Hospital. Millvale/Penn is the second highest used stop in all of Garfield with 164 people using it daily on a weekday. Mathilda/Penn is only 86 people each day.
- Stop spacing - guidelines PAT adopted in 2018 calls for average spacing of 900 feet. average spacing after the stops are eliminated is an average of 1100 feet. Why should we have to walk further in the cold, over hilly terrain, in wind and rain?

**R:** When we talk about the 900 feet between bus stops, what's the expectation that you should have a bus stop in proximity to your house? What about timing? How often do you expect a bus to come?

**FM:** The answer is relevant to the demand

**R:** (Clarifies) the time you spend walking to the consolidated stop and the time you spend waiting for the bus are similar.

**FM:** True, but for populations who are older or with disabilities, walking further is a huge issue

**R:** How close should bus stops be to the people? It's not door service and too many stops slow it down

**FM:** Origin of most riders isn't going to be right at the bus stop. They have to walk from somewhere to get to that stop.

**R:** How long is route?

**SS:** From Fifth & Penn to downtown

**FM:** Stop spacing is inconsistent in this new plan. Atlantic to Aiken that they are keeping is only one block. They're getting rid of several stops that will make spacing 3 blocks between stops.

**R:** Has port authority released what the efficiency gains would be? What are the expectations of what the efficiencies will be?

**SS:** No, they have not provided data on expected efficiencies or data on previously consolidated routes.

**R:** Consolidation affects access to food and jobs. Data points, reasoning and analysis should be crystal clear and presented to the public

**R:** Who are the elected officials in the room?

**CH:** Jennifer Kiley, staff of State Senator Jay Costa and Abby Rae LaCombe, Chief of Staff for Councilwoman Deb Gross. A staff member of Representative Sara Innamorato confirmed she would be attending but hasn't arrived yet.

**FM:** PAT's stated goal is to improve on-time performance of the buses on the route. Goal for on-time performance was 73% system wide on the website. 88 Penn comes through Bakery Square/East Liberty or from downtown it's already delayed at that point by construction or congestion, those are the pressure points. So why are they making Garfield & Bloomfield residents walk further because of congestion in East Liberty?

**FM:** They aren't going to save any boarding time because likely the same amount of people will ride the bus. If we save 1.5 minutes in Garfield with these stops but each person had to walk 3 more minutes to get to the bus stop, then the riders are losing time and are definitely not gaining anything.

**R:** My stop getting cut. Pittsburgh has 160 sunny days a year, the rest are cold, rainy, snowy and icy, putting us at risk of tripping, slipping and falls when we have to go further to get to stops. How do they plan to build up ridership if the stops are more inconvenient? Penn Avenue in East Liberty at rush hour has bumper to bumper traffic, there's no way they're going to improve their performance. I use the Millvale/Penn stop which also is a school bus stop for

children and has a crossing guard. Where I will now have to cross to get a stop at Winebiddle/Penn, there is no traffic light or 4-way stop sign.

**R:** Traffic is the main reason bus stops are late which can't be controlled by reducing stops

**R:** Is this a done deal? Are they considering changing it? How do we stop it?

**CH:** Not exactly. There is an open comment period now. PAT rode routes and released this plan to eliminate stops and wants people to give feedback after the decisions have been made. They did reverse their decision to eliminate one stop on the North Side that was very near a food pantry and homeless shelter after lots of public pressure. BDC opposes this backwards community engagement process

**SS:** Christina will be speaking at the PAT board meeting tomorrow morning

**R:** Can anyone speak?

**CH:** Unfortunately not, the deadline to sign up to speak was last Friday. I plan to oppose the intentional community process and lack of transparency around the criteria used in their decision making. I will also take what I hear tonight and include it, particularly if elimination of certain stops jumps out.

**R:** How is the port authority funded?

**FM:** Mainly through state and local grants, capital projects, sometimes federal money. This is taxpayer money

*[Note Added After Meeting: Per the Port Authority 2019 budget in Fiscal Year 2018 they received \$78,998,000 in passenger revenue (fares), \$30,927,000 in federal subsidy, \$242,183,000 in state subsidy, and \$37,438,000 in local funding as well as other sources listed in their [budget on their website](#)]*

**R:** Eliminating stops is uncalled for. A lot of elderly people will be badly affected, some who have canes. A lot of people don't drive and have to take the bus and are already waiting half an hour for the bus. Low income families depend on buses to get everywhere. Why are they doing this?

**R:** Woman standing with previous resident asked to interrupt: This woman said she had been walking around for an hour trying to get directions to this meeting and was very confused. Could we imagine how a person like her would find a new stop?

**R:** PAT decisions are shrouded in mystery as to which stops are selected and the criteria are unclear. It seems clear looking at total numbers around stops that they are looking at amenities around stops since the food pantry on the North Side stop was being eliminated in favor of a stop with a shelter. PAT needs to be clear with the community and disclose all criteria. PAT is not seeking input of community and not looking at what community assets/resources are adjacent to or near to the stop. Also agree that most of the stop elimination won't save time. Should be willing to come talk to the community but are not coming to community meetings when invited.

**R:** This is going to disproportionately affect protected groups and there is no evidence that they have done that research even though it's in their values. One of the stops being eliminated

is half a block from a daycare center. Walking further in any weather with a small child is a big deal. Could also end up costing people more money by paying for more transfers. Need to focus on the criteria - how is this going to affect the people who ride the bus and pay the taxes and how does it meet their needs?

**R:** I notice 88 Penn is a pretty busy bus at night - is it a bus that gets a lot of evening traffic? Are there ridership rates?

**FM:** Yes, they have hourly bus ridership data

**R:** Is this route used more?

**FM:** This is a highly utilized route

**FM:** PAT will consolidate stops on 2 routes per quarter and they pass through a multitude of neighborhoods. They also affect other routes - in E Liberty there are 6 routes that will be affected. The 48 Arlington route on the SouthSide, also up for consolidations right now, is eliminating a stop that affects Bloomfield. Riders will not be able to take the 54 to Bloomfield from that stop any more. This is not about one district or one route, this is system-wide and each route affects each other and riders. Are we going to have the same energy when they come for the next routes? It's going to wear people down. The way the website is structured is that you have to make comment on individual stops, there's no way to comment on several.

**R:** Leveraging the elected officials, proactive approach he'd recommend is to talk to the police officers - how many crashes do you have in the consolidated intersections? The stops being retained might be a proven unsafe intersection.

**Jennifer Kiley, State Senator Jay Costa Staff:** Jessica Walls-Lavelle on the PAT planning & stakeholder committee and could be a good person to reach out to.

**R:** Since we have to fight for every stop individually, and we have these elected officials, is there any plan to rally the electeds to apply pressure? Fatigue is real and this process is going to continue until every route's stops have been consolidated. I use the 88 Penn all the time - all these stops are important because this is a hill. I don't have the energy to fight every stop but I do have the energy to vote. Our electeds need to represent us. Can we point out that PAT is clearly discriminating, that their process has biases and there are going to be things they want to hide. Please report back to us about how our elected officials are responding.

**CH:** We will

**R:** Was Councilman Burgess invited?

**CH:** I invited the representatives of Bloomfield, and I believe Bloomfield-Garfield Corp handled invitations of their elected representatives

**R:** Absence of port authority is telling - seeing proliferation of private modes of transportation and reducing stops is a creative destruction to people's quality of life. Organizations need to be wholly antagonistic

**R:** Stops are going to be determined by # of ridership or money?

**SS:** Ridership data encompasses many data points. There's average daily wheelchair deployment, average daily weekend ridership, and it's not clear what and how heavily those are factored in when they make a decision.

**FM:** One of the heaviest used stops is Millvale/Penn and it's not clear why they made that decision

**R:** Points of leverage and power are often civil rights lawsuits. Use data on raising of the ramp to leverage change. Who are the people getting on this stop? And if that [attendee] is saying that stop has a lot of riders, then if we can break out the ridership and see that there's a percentage of black, disable, etc. who are protected classes

**R:** Stop at aldi's being eliminated?

**SS:** No

**R:** Concerned about people walking longer distances to catch a bus at night and waiting or walking in places that feel unsafe, where there are less eyes on the street

*[Note added after meeting: For instance, Millvale/Penn stop directly across from Mixtape, an establishment with large glass windows open late, while Mathilda/Penn isn't adjacent to any business open late]*

**R:** Sympathetic to argument about opposing all stop eliminations, but since we're under the gun, chances are PAT is going to go ahead with this, and maybe 1 or 2 stops might be saved but it's not possible to save them all. Rich Fitzgerald appoints most of the board members, his appointees follow his lead, he is the major pressure point

**Abby Rae LaCombe (District 7 Councilwoman Deb Gross staff):** Funding it comes from the state, need to talk to state rep to talk to them about how they are going to fund public transportation in future years

**Dan Yablonsky, Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT):** Introduces PPT, mentions advocacy of PPT around the issue, refers to a clear community process PPT outlined on their website that PAT could adopt

**SS:** Port Authority hosting upcoming community meetings beginning Wednesday, January 29. Consolidation might not be on the agenda but questions and comments could be made at those meetings. Closest meeting to us will be at Kingsley Center in coming weeks.

**Meeting ended at approximately 6:45 P.M.**